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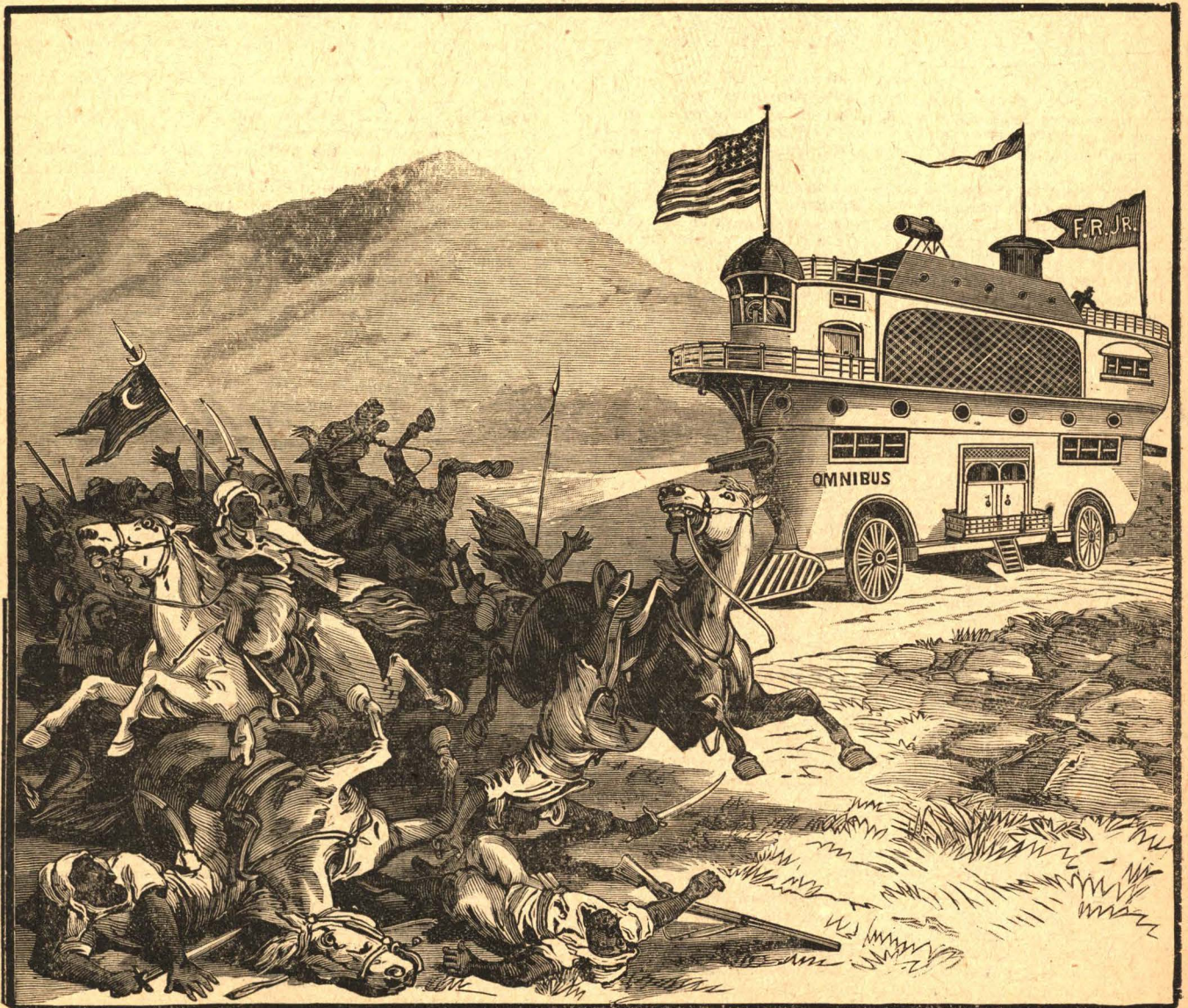
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FROM THE NILE TO THE NIGER; or, Frank Reade, Jr., Lost in the Soudan With His "Overland Omnibus."

By "NONAME."



Frank Reade, Jr., inserted a shell in the breech of the pneumatic tube. Then he sighted it. The next moment there was a thunderous roar as the projectile struck in the midst of the savage crew. The result was terrific.

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From the Nile to the Niger;

OR,

Frank Reade, Jr., Lost in the Soudan With His
"Overland Omnibus."

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Around the Arctic Circle; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Most Famous Trip With His Air-Ship, the "Orbit," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE RAMBLERS' CLUB.

"NOWHERE on the face of the earth is there a region to compare with that part of Africa, between the Nile and the Niger," declared Edgar Foss the distinguished young American traveler. He continued with earnestness:

"From the Red Sea to the Gulf of Guinea is the heart of the Dark Continent, and while we consider it all explored territory, I assure you there are many parts of it, of which we have never heard, many strange peoples unknown to us, and great natural wonders much beyond the ken of the most powerful imagination. I know this for a fact."

Walter Dane, his companion and the most celebrated yachtsman of the New York Club, listened to this declaration with much interest.

He knocked the ashes from his cigar and tilted back in his chair. Through the windows of the Ramblers' Club they could see the fashionable throng of gay Fifth Avenue in the morning.

"You were some years in that part of the world, Ed?"

"Yes, and they were years of great excitement and wild experience."

"They must have been. Certainly that part of Africa ought to hold great charms for the explorer. Being in the heart of the Great Soudan—"

"Ah, that is it exactly. It is the fact that it is in the Soudan that bars the traveler out."

"Why should it?"

"Indeed why should it not? The Soudan is the hot bed of wild savagery and hostile clans. It is impossible to thoroughly explore it."

"Unless with an army, eh?"

"It would have to be a big army, I assure you, and well equipped. Even then there would be a big risk of defeat. But I would just like to explore that part of the world if it could be done safely."

And the young traveler's eyes flashed, and his bosom swelled with the spirit of the true explorer.

His companion looked at him critically a moment.

Then he said:

"Do you really mean that, Ed?"

"Of course I do."

Dane lazily picked up a newspaper from the floor and scanned its columns a moment.

"Look here!" he exclaimed. "Here is the chance. Did you read about this famous inventor, Frank Reade, Jr.?"

"Frank Reade, Jr.? Well, I have heard of him. He is the inventor of a submarine boat and a team of electric horses, is he not?"

"Exactly. From all I have heard of him he is the most wonderful genius of this century."

"I have no doubt of it. But what has that to do with our question of the Soudan?"

Let me read this paragraph to you, and then you will understand."

With which Walter proceeded to read:

"The latest product of the inventive genius of Frank Reade, Jr., who is well known in this country as a most remarkable young man, is the Electric Overland Omnibus.

"Our correspondent paid a visit to the shops of the inventor in the pretty little city of Readestown, and was politely received by Mr. Reade, who permitted him a first glance at the famous machine, and a wonder it is.

"In shape it is not altogether unlike its namesake, the omnibus. The body is made of plates of thinly rolled steel, and rests upon a running gear of delicate springs and rubber tired wheels. The forward wheels are traverse, and by them the machine is steered.

"To attempt to describe the omnibus in every detail would require a great deal of space. The sketch herewith given by our artist will convey a better idea than words.

"There are doors and windows in the hull of the vehicle. Forward is a platform with a guard rail, and towering above it is the pilot-house with its plate glass windows and its wonderful key board by which the electric machinery is controlled.

"The upper section of the hull is of fine bullet-proof netting. Above this is the hurricane deck, and here is a powerful electric search-light which cannot be excelled in this country.

"We must not forget to mention the two powerful dynamite guns carried by the Omnibus. They are but thin steel tubes, but operated by pneumatic pressure throw a small projectile many hundred yards with terrific effect. Mr. Reade has constructed the Omnibus with a view to the possibility of encountering hostile tribes in wild and out-of-the-way parts of the world.

"The interior of the Omnibus is a revelation. The cabins are richly upholstered, and comprise main saloon, gun room, chemical room, engine room, galley for cooking and sleeping compartments.

"It might be thought at first that such a vehicle would be clumsy and difficult to drive only over a smooth surface. But the Omnibus is provided with tilting running gear and wheels so low set that they can easily run over any object of reasonable size, without any serious jar to the occupants.

"When questioned as to his purposes with the Omnibus, Mr. Reade declared that he intended visiting some unexplored part of the world.

"With such a vehicle and his powerful dynamite guns, he need fear neither man nor beast in the wildest jungles. Mr. Reade is accompanied upon all his trips by a couple of faithful companions, a jolly negro named Pomp, and a witty Irishman, Barney O'Shea."

As Walter finished reading, Foss drew a deep breath. He arose and went to the window. Silence ensued for some moments.

Then the distinguished traveler said:

"You don't suppose that this is all a fanciful yarn, do you?"

"Well," said Walter positively, "I don't see why it should be. We know that there is such a man as Frank Reade, Jr., and we have heard of his inventions."

"By Jove, that is so! Now if we could only interest him in this African trip—"

"What? From the Nile to the Niger?"

"Yes."

Both men looked at each other.

"What a capital thing it would be! Only think, with such a machine as the Electric Omnibus one could travel with safety through all those savage countries and defy their murderous inhabitants!"

"That looks true."

"It is true! By Jove! Why can we not interest Mr. Reade in this scheme? We must do it!"

Foss was very much excited.

He touched a bell.

One of the club house attendants responded.

"Bring me a telegraph blank," he said, "also paper and ink."

While the attendant was gone not a word was spoken. Both men seemed plunged into deepest thought.

Presently the attendant returned with paper and ink. He placed it on the table and withdrew.

Then Foss picked up the pen and said:

"What shall I say to him, Walter?"

"Ask him point blank if he will undertake a trip from the Nile to the Niger. We may as well know our fate at once."

"You are right."

Foss scratched away with the pen for a few moments. When he had finished he said:

"This is what I have written."

He handed the slip to Dane. The latter read as follows:

"MR. FRANK READE, JR.,

Readestown.

"We have seen an account of your Omnibus and are much interested. Will you make the trip across Northern Africa from the Nile to the Niger, with two travelers who are familiar with Africa? Will pay all expenses if desired. Please answer at once.

EDGAR FOSS,

Ramblers Club, New York City."

Dane nodded his head emphatically.

"It's all right," he declared. "Send it right along."

Foss again touched the bell. In a few moments the message was on its way.

Both men were much excited.

They paced the room nervously. Finally Dane consulted his watch.

"It is one o'clock!" he said. "We ought to have some lunch."

"I will wait here for you," said Foss. "I do not care to eat."

"I shall not go unless you do!"

"I shall not go until I get an answer from the telegram."

"Do you expect it so soon?"

"It ought to be here in two hours. If it does not come until night I shall wait just the same."

So each lit a cigar and sat with their chairs tilted back and their feet on the window sill.

Time passed.

But in their suspense the minutes seemed hours, and the hours were days. Yet they kept a close watch of the street.

It was four o'clock and they were finishing the fourth cigar when Foss suddenly clutched Dane's arm. A messenger boy was coming up the steps.

They would soon know their fate. A moment later the message was in Edgar's hands.

He broke the seal nervously. Thus he read Frank Reade, Jr.'s answer:

"MR. EDGAR FOSS,

"Ramblers' Club, N. Y. City.

"The project you propose is to me in the highest degree acceptable."

"Hurrah!" yelled Foss, in deepest joy. Then he went on:

"The plan is a grand one and I will be glad to confer with you personally. Let me know at once how this can be done.

"Yours truly,

"FRANK READE, JR."

To express the insane joy of the two club men would be an utter impossibility for tongue or pen.

CHAPTER II.

ON BOARD THE STEAMER.

LET us pass over the incidents of the next week.

This will find us in the great yard of the Reade Machine Works in Readestown. Upon a side track were three large cars.

In these was securely packed the sections of the wonderful Electric Omnibus.

The plan was to ship it across the great Atlantic, and through the Suez Canal and the Red Sea to the east coast of Africa.

There it would be put together and the great Overland trip begun.

Of course it had been impossible to keep the affair out of the newspapers. The whole country was agog over it.

The explorers were constantly in receipt of hundreds of offers from all sorts of cranks and people who were anxious to accompany them on the great trip.

Of course, none of these were answered. They were consigned to the waste basket as soon as received.

A special train was to take the sections of the Omnibus to New York and the steamer dock. All was in readiness for the start.

And when the train rolled out of Readestown, it was amid wild cheering and the greatest of excitement.

Frank Reade, Jr., with Barney and Pomp, joined Foss and Dane aboard a Pullman car bound for New York. Thus the start was made.

Everywhere they might have met with an ovation had they cared to make a stop.

But the engineer had his orders and the train had the right of way, and the African explorers were carried through to New York with but little delay.

The steamer Osman Pasha of the Mediterranean service was ready at her dock.

The machine had been stored in her hold and all went aboard. Then down the river and out to sea the big vessel went.

Barney and Pomp were the life of the party.

Two jollier chaps could hardly be imagined, and they were always ready for fun.

Barney, with his comical mug like a chimpanzee and his shock of red hair, was as full of ready wit as a nut is of meat.

Nothing could escape his keen criticism.

He regaled the passengers with a roaring fand of amusement.

Wherever he went he carried his genuine Irish fiddle with him, and he could play all the Irish airs from the days of Brian Boru downward.

Pomp, as black as soot, was not to be outdone by his colleague.

He could play the banjo, dance, and sing plantation airs without number.

Between these two lively chaps times were not at all dull aboard the ship.

Barney had a predilection for playing tricks on Pomp, and the darky vice versa.

They were always in a stew of some sort, yet always good natured about it. It was hard to say which generally came out at the best end of the horn. But honors were generally divided.

Barney was a capital sailor, but Pomp was at times wretchedly seasick. The Celt took advantage of this fact to torment his colleague.

"Begorra, it's a foine specimen yez be," he snapped. "Shure, ye're niver sure av yure stomach. Phwat a foine man yez wud be in the navy!"

"Huh!" retorted Pomp, with asperity, "don' yo' be so berry funny! I bet yo' am sick yo'self afo' you get froot!"

"Divil a bit," retorted Barney. "If yez was as shure av gittin' through Purgatory as I am av me stomach, yez wud be all roight."

Pomp did not carry the argument any further.

But his eyes twinkled keenly, and a brilliant thought crossed his mind. It was too good a scheme to lose.

At once he was determined to put it into execution. He chuckled and rubbed his hands and scratched his kinky wool.

"Ki dar!" he muttered. "I'se jes' gwine to git square wif dat no count l'ishman in de berry bes' way, yo' bet! I'se in fo' him!"

Just at this moment the captain came on deck and said that they were going to have a bit of a "blow."

This meant that the sea would run high, and the darky knew that it would bring his malady back again with all force.

He made a bee line for the cabin. He heard a snicker at his elbow and turning saw Barney grinning at him.

"Xez had bether git inter yer shell," jested the Celt. "I'm sorry for yez that yez ain't a bether sailor."

"Mebbe yo' git sick yet yo' sef," warned Pomp; "dis am de berry time fo' it. De cap'en say dat it am gwine to blow hahd."

"Ho—ho—ho!" laughed Barney, uproariously. "Yez think so, do yez? Well, be me sowl, there niver was a wind sthrong enough yet to make me saysick."

"Don' yo' be too suah!" admonished the darky, as he went below.

But he didn't go to his stateroom.

He had a dark and deadly purpose. He meant to get square with the Irishman for his jeering remarks.

"I fix him yo' bet," he muttered.

From a shelf in the medicine closet which was in the cabin Pomp took down a small bottle. Nobody was near to see him.

He looked at the label. It read "Extract of Jalap." Chuckling the darky proceeded to fill a small vial in his vest pocket from the bottle.

At this moment dinner was piped. A rush was made for the companionway, for the seasick ones were anxious to get a meal before the storm should come.

They might not be able to after the storm should arrive.

Pomp knew this well, and he was promptly on hand. Barney entered and sat by his side.

The first course was brought and the company ate and joked merrily.

The captain smiled grimly all the while, for he knew well enough how soon their tune would change.

Pomp and Barney had many an interchange of personal jests. Then at an unobserved moment, the darky got in his deadly work.

He managed to dump a terrific dose of the stuff into Barney's pudding sauce. The Celt unsuspectingly got the whole of it.

Pomp was so elated that he could hardly conceal his feelings. Indeed he almost forgot the approaching pangs of his own sickness.

After the meal was over the seasick ones went back to the deck to keep about as long as possible in the fresh air. The ship had begun to roll quite hard.

Pomp began already to feel green in the face, though he kept up well. Many of the ladies had gone below in dire distress.

Barney walked briskly up and down, affecting to enjoy the rolling of the ship.

The gale was growing and the ship was being held before it. Pomp watched his intended victim with the most intense of eagerness. He was almost ready to give up himself.

"Begorra, there's nothing loike a loife an the ocean wave!" declared the Celt, exuberantly. "Shure an' I'd loike to be a sailor bether than anything else I know av."

Then he shot a contemptuous glance at Pomp. To his surprise the darky grinned and said:

"I bet yo' a new hat, l'ish dat yo' git sick afo' dis gale am ober."

Barney gave a gasp.

"Phwat! I get sick? Shure an' phwy do yez think that?"

"I nebber did heah nobody brag so much dat didn't git de wust ob

it straight off. Yo' bettah look out. On mah wo'd yo' look sick now."

Barney opened his mouth to reply. But just at that moment the ship gave a terrific roll, and to his sheer amazement he felt a deathly pang in his stomach.

He glared at Pomp.

Then he looked wildly about him. His face had turned from a ruddy red to the whiteness of a sheet.

Sick was not the name for it. Pomp was no sicker than usual during the gale, but Barney was never in more agony in his life.

Every-school boy knows how sick jalap will make one. While there is nothing serious or lasting in such a sickness, it is nevertheless most excruciating for the time.

Barney was very quiet and reserved during the rest of the voyage. Pomp was secretly triumphant.

The Celt might never have known but that it was real sea-sickness which assailed him had it not been for an incident.

The ship's surgeon missed his phial of jalap and made inquiry for it. It was found in Pomp's stateroom. The darky attempted a confused explanation; one of the passengers recollected seeing him empty a phial similar to this into a dish of pudding and—the cat was out of the bag.

Barney read between the lines and was staggered at the slickness of the trick.

"Begorra!" he muttered. "I thought it was funny how I came to be say-sick for the fast toime in my loffe."

Of course the laugh was on Barney. The Celt felt rather sheepish, but inwardly resolved to get square with his colleague.

Just how he did it, we will see in the course of our story.

One day the steamer sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar and entered the blue Mediterranean.

A brief stop was made at Sicily, and then the Osman Pasha went on to Port Said.

Here she passed through the Suez Canal and floated into the Red Sea.

The disembarkation of the Electric Omnibus took place at a small port known as Trinkitot.

It was inhabited by only a few Arabs and Mohammedans. The passports from the Sultan which had been secured at Port Said, silenced any objections to the landing which the natives in their prejudice might have made.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE LAND OF THE ARABS.

For the first time the African travelers began to realize in full force the magnitude of their undertaking.

The great deserts and wild regions of the mighty Soudan lay before them.

Foss knew the most about these regions, of course, but even he was bound to be somewhat impressed with the gravity of the project.

It was unlikely that the ignorant, barbarous tribes of the interior were going to allow the machine to pass without molestation through their land.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew this.

He also knew that in a pitched battle the machine with its electric guns could destroy many of the foe. In fact, it could doubtless overcome any force sent against them.

But this would mark the course of the Omnibus with a path of blood, a thing which Frank was most desirous of avoiding.

His hope was to establish amicable relations with the people during the entire trip. If it became necessary to fight, then fight they must.

Yet there were many ways in which the machine and its crew could be destroyed.

The fire of artillery or any accident to the machinery, causing a stoppage in some hostile region would be most disastrous.

All these possibilities, however, had been well considered, and as far as possible provided against.

Frank's policy, as far as possible, was to run away from the foe, and thus avoid a battle.

From Trinkitot the course was laid to Berber, or above the Fifth Cataract of the Nile.

This would necessitate passing through the land of the Bishoreen Arabs, who were religiously intolerant, warlike and thieving.

There was some chance of trouble with these people, as they would certainly look with disfavor upon the invasion of their land.

"But we have the passports from the sultan," said Frank. "I should hardly think they would dare to dispute those."

"Pshaw," said Edgar, "what do they care for the sultan? Not the least thing, I can assure you. He has never yet been able to subdue these wild and lawless Bedouins. However, we will get along as easily as possible."

"Have we more to fear from them than from other tribes?"

"I think not. All we need really fear is artillery. I don't believe the Bishoreen people have heavy guns."

Great excitement was created at Trinkitot by the arrival of the explorers.

They congregated by thousands at the little quay where the disembarkation was made.

At times trouble was threatened, but this was staved adroitly by Foss, who had the sultan's manifesto, which he flourished officiously.

Frank had brought several machinists along with him on the Osman Pasha.

These were now set busily at work to put the machine together. They made surprisingly quick work of it.

In two days' time the Omnibus was all put together and equipped for the start.

Then the captain of the Osman Pasha received his instructions.

He was to proceed to the port of Freetown in the Province of Sierra Leone and there await the arrival of the explorers. From there they would sail for home.

Thus matters were settled when a new factor appeared upon the scene.

Suddenly the streets of the little town swarmed with Mohametan soldiers. All were mounted upon the fleetest of steeds and had the appearance of having come suddenly in from the desert.

They did not make an attack upon the machine or the explorers, but the show of force was significant.

The explorers were for a moment nonplused by this development. Captain Weldon was fearful that they might board his ship and perhaps burn it, so he dropped out from the quay into the harbor.

This left the explorers with the Omnibus wholly dependent upon their resources. They were alone in a foreign land, and their lives depended upon their action now.

But Foss, who understood the Arab nature well, said:

"It is the treacherous work of the governor of the town. He fears the Sultan's order, but at the same time is averse to our landing here. Not daring to resist us himself, he has called in every war-like Sheik with his men in this part of the country. They are Bishoreen as you can easily see. They mean to oppose us."

"What then shall we do?" asked Frank.

"Sail right through them."

But the young inventor was averse to this.

"I dislike to do that," he said. "I think we had better temporize with them first."

"Very well, try it," said Foss, doubtfully. "I don't think it will avail anything."

Frank went into the pilot house and started the machine forward. It proceeded only a hundred yards.

The street in front of it was literally blocked with mounted Arabs. Of course Frank brought the machine to a stop. He could not well do otherwise without running over the opposing line of men and horses.

"They mean to stop us, don't they?" he said dubiously.

"Of course," said Foss. "I would soon make quick work of them."

"But would that be really for the best?"

"I don't see why. However, let us first parley with them."

The young explorer, who was familiar with the Arab tongue, stepped out on the platform in front of the pilot-house.

He held a white flag in token of amity.

It was answered by a tall, darkly handsome young sheik riding forward on a milk white charger.

He made a profound salute, and then raising his sword to the sky, repeated an incantation in the "name of Allah."

Then Foss addressed him in the Arab tongue:

"What mean you, Effendi, in hindering our progress thus?"

"You invade the land of the chosen of Allah!" replied the young sheik. "I am Murad el Hassan, and Allah has commissioned me to oppose you!"

"Know you that we have the sanction of the great sultan?"

The sheik bowed low.

"The sultan is great," he said, "but Allah is greater."

This evasion of the sultan's authority was enough for Foss. He foresaw trouble at once.

"Then you resist the decree of your sultan?" he asked.

"Allah resists it," replied the obdurate Murad el Hassan, serenely.

"Yet we must pass!" replied Foss, firmly. "You must not oppose us. If you do you will be destroyed. This is a traveling fort with guns which can blow you and your whole army into fragments."

The eyes of the Arab sheik flashed, and he jingled his scimeter defiantly. He raised his hand, and cried:

"Allah is greater than your guns. The men of El Hassan know not fear, but welcome death for the reward Allah will give them!"

Foss turned to Frank, who was in the door of the pilot-house.

"You see," he said, "it is no use to parley with them. There is but one thing to do, and that is to cut our way through them!"

"That is your belief?"

"Yes!"

"All right!" said Frank, grimly. "Come inside. We will do it." They closed the pilot-house door behind them. Frank placed a hand upon the motor lever.

The vehicle shot forward. Straight toward the row of horsemen it thundered. Then the Arabs fired a volley at the omnibus.

Of course their bullets did no harm.

They simply rattled against the metal sides of the machine. Barney and Pomp wanted to retaliate but Frank forbade this.

"We will not take human life unnecessarily!" he said. "I fear it will be a necessity soon enough."

"In that you are right," declared Foss. "I don't see how we can help killing a few of these heathens!"

"They will never be missed!" declared Walter Dane; "they are a curse upon this beautiful country."

The onslaught of the Omnibus had its effect upon the Arabs. It

was a literal thunderbolt of iron descending upon them, against which they could not hope to stand.

There was a scrambling of their terrified horses. The air was full of flying bullets, and the Arabs made savage blows at the machine with their scimeters.

But it passed resistlessly through their line.

Several of the Arabs fell under the wheels and were crushed. In a few seconds the machine was speeding out of the town.

The Arabs came after in hot pursuit.

But they might as well have chased an eagle. Their horses were fleet but they were no match for the Omnibus.

Beyond the town for a ways there was a level plain. Across this the machine sped swiftly.

In the distance were mighty mountain chains. When these were reached of course progress must be more slow.

The pursuing Arabs were but a cloud in the distance now.

Yet they hung on in the pursuit, doubtless with the belief that when the rough country was reached they could overtake their foes.

The country between the Red Sea and Berber was intensely rocky and rough.

The distance was fully one hundred and fifty miles. As it was not yet past noon, Frank hoped to cover the most of it before nightfall.

The machine bowled on at a rapid pace and the mountains every moment loomed up nearer at hand.

In due course the end of the plain was reached and then a pass was looked for, which would take them through to the country beyond. This was easy to find.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CARAVAN.

OF course all the while our adventurers were searching for a pass the pursuing Arabs were drawing nearer.

The Arabian horse is not noted so much for its endurance as its speed. Y'er the steeds of El Hassan's gang seemed to have both.

Frank noticed that the Arabs were fast coming up and said:

"They're bound to chase us, aren't they? Well now, they will have a long road to traverse."

"Oh, don't fear!" said Foss, "they will go any further than Musma!"

"Where is that?"

"About half way to the Nile."

"And why will they not go further?"

"For the fact that the clan of Bedouins beyond there are foes of theirs and very powerful."

"But will they not also give us much trouble?"

"They may, though they are not so unfriendly for the fact that they trade with many foreigners who come up the Nile to Berber."

"Ah, I see. I hope we shall get along amicably with them."

At this moment Barney came to the pilot house and cried in some excitement:

"Oh, Mither Frank, wud yez be afther comin' in here?"

"What's the matter?" asked Frank.

"Shure, there's Arabs in front av us. We're all surrounded."

"Golly!" cried Pomp; "I don't believe it am de same pussons, fo' dey couldn't hab got in front ob us."

Frank, with the two explorers, rushed into the pilot house. From the observation window could be seen the cause of Barney's excitement.

It was true that there were Arabs in front of them, but it was not a war party.

It was instead a caravan of camels and horses, which was winding down out of the hills.

The gay colors of the procession made a beautiful picture against the green of the hill slopes. For a moment the explorers gazed upon the scene with interest.

Then Frank exclaimed:

"Have we anything to fear from them?"

"Not a thing," replied Foss; "but they have much to fear."

"Not from us."

"Oh, no, but from our pursuers. Wait until El Hassan's men sight them. They will not bother with us any more."

"Is that so?"

"See! Did I not tell you so?"

Foss certainly had spoken truly. There was a change of attitude in Hassan's men.

They had swerved in their course, and were no longer in pursuit of the Omnibus.

Instead, they had divided into two parties and were riding with all haste down upon the caravan.

The latter had come to a halt. It was a critical moment for them.

It was useless for them to retreat; with their slower camels they would easily have been overtaken.

There was no alternative for them but to defend themselves. The sequel of this had been many a time foretold.

The Arabs better armed, better equipped and better fighters would be sure to prevail.

Then would follow murder, outrage and despoiling of the rich treasures of the caravan.

To these lawless sons of the desert a caravan is lawful prey.

Foss explained all this, and developments were watched with interest. There was much visible excitement in the caravan.

The camels were huddled together in the mouth of the pass. The horses were also driven to the rear.

Huge stones were rolled up to make a breastworks, and the soldiers of the train, mostly hired slaves and consequently cowards, were here ensoenced to make the best possible defense.

But one critical eye among the spectators saw at once the sequel of this. Foss saw at a glance how quickly the savage Bedouins would roll back that thin line of defense.

Nearer the Bedouins were drawing to their prey. In a short while the conflict would open.

Frank Reade, Jr., had been doing some tall thinking.

"I don't know but that we ought to help those people," he said. "What do you think of it, Foss?"

"We ought to," replied the explorer. "It seems a pity to see them destroyed in such a manner. Of course we could go on and leave the Bedouins to consummate their ends, and in that way elude them, but—"

"That would not be right," declared Frank. "We will be neglecting a humane duty if we do that."

Then he put a hand upon the wheel and turned the machine toward the distant caravan.

Quickly the intervening distance was covered.

The Omnibus, as it came thundering on, made more of a fright for the caravan people than the Bedouins.

It created a sensation. And why should it not?

The desert people had never seen anything of the kind before, and it looked to them exactly like some huge monster about to descend upon and destroy them.

But Frank brought the Omnibus to a halt not one hundred yards from the caravan defenses.

Bullets were rattling against the sides of the Omnibus, for fire had already been opened.

But Frank displayed a white flag and the hostile demonstrations ceased. Then Foss went out on the platform and hailed the caravan.

He parleyed with them for a while. The result was that the caravan people came boldly out and hailed the Americans gladly.

One patriarchal old man seemed to be the leader.

Foss took time to say:

"He is the Sheik and the owner of the caravan. He is a merchant of Derr, a large city on the Nile. His name is Abou Ben Shir."

"They seem to be in great dread of Hassan's men."

"Yes."

"Tell them there is no reason to have fears."

"I have done so."

Further conversation with the caravan people was now prevented by the near approach of the men of El Hassan.

That they meant business was morally certain.

They drove in a few skirmishers sent out by Abou Shir, and then the battle opened in earnest.

From the outset it would have been a hollow victory for El Hassan, but at this juncture the Omnibus took a hand.

Frank went forward and sighted one of the electric guns.

He was extremely averse to human slaughter. But there was obviously no help for this.

So he did not show compunction, but inserted a shell in the breech of the pneumatic tube. Then he sighted it.

The next moment there was a thunderous roar as the projectile struck in the midst of the savage crew. The result was terrific.

Men and horses, earth, stones and all manner of debris was hurled into the air in a literal shaft many feet in height.

Full fifty of the Bedouins were killed then and there.

It checked their wild charge and for a moment threw them into the wildest state of confusion. They retreated hastily for some distance.

The caravan people were overjoyed as well as astonished. To them it was a literal miracle.

What manner of gun was this which made no report, yet threw a thunderous projectile with such effect? Certainly it was no ordinary machine.

Cheers arose wildly and prayers were returned to Allah. It was a wonderful preservation.

Frank saw that El Hassan's men were again forming to renew the attack.

He was sorry for this.

He had hoped that one shot from the dynamite gun would be enough. But it had not proved so.

Had there been more time he would have preferred obstructing their course with electric wires. But it was plain that there was no time for this.

So he again loaded the dynamite gun. Once more he sighted it. This time he aimed not into the midst of the marauding crew, but to strike the ground at their feet.

There was just a little recoil as the electric gun went off. The projectile sped true to the mark.

It struck full in front of the gang of Bedouins. There was a small earthquake in that vicinity for a moment.

A mighty mound of sand and stones was erected full in the faces of the Bedouins. Some of them were buried alive in it.

This last shot was enough for the marauding gang. They at once beat an incontinent retreat.

From that moment El Hassan and his men had no end of respect for the Omnibus and its deadly forces. They were quite unwilling to incur its terrible power further.

They retreated to a safe distance on the plain, and there they hovered for some while, not venturing another attack.

Abou Ben Shir was very profuse in his expressions of gratitude for the defense of the caravan.

The caravan people, men, women and children, crowded about the Omnibus. Frank modestly declined a proffered reward.

But a serious question now arose.

As soon as the Omnibus should go on its way there was no moral certainty but that the Bedouins would again attack the caravan.

How was this to be avoided?

Foss was impatient.

"You ought to have blowed up the whole gang, Frank!" he said, "they never would have been missed. It would have been a mercy to the world."

But Frank could not quite agree to this. However, he said:

"We will make sure that they do not return, for we will chase them to a safe distance."

Abou Ben Shir prostrated himself with gratitude at this, but very fortunately this did not become necessary as an incident at that moment occurred to set matters aright once more.

CHAPTER V.

ACROSS THE NILE.

Down through the pass came the sound of a horn. It was a call which brought every Mahometan to his feet.

Abou Ben Shir gave a great cry of joy, and began to praise Allah; then our adventurers, glancing up, saw the reason for all this.

Down from the pass rode a company of armed soldiers. There were full two hundred of them, and they carried the colors of the Sultan.

At their head rode a commanding personage, with full two feet of beard and a turban of cloth and gold. In an instant the caravan people prostrated themselves.

"The Emir of Derr," explained Abou Shir to Edgar Foss. "We are safe enough now, for he will give us safe escort from the horde of El Hassan."

The arrival of the Emir and his men was indeed a godsend to our adventurers, for it enabled them to proceed at once on their journey.

The Emir and his men stopped long enough to exchange salutations with the American travelers.

The Sultan's passports were examined and pronounced all right. Then El Hassan and his gang were denounced.

The Emir declared he would burn them alive and scatter their ashes to the winds. But he might have added the proviso of catching them.

Then Frank took Abou Shir and the Emir aboard the Omnibus and showed them its mechanism and fittings. They were astounded.

But the problem of electricity was too deep a one for them. They could not be made to understand that.

However, they were delighted, and the Emir offered his costly jewels for the invention. But of course Frank politely declined.

The caravan being now under the guardianship of the Emir's men, the protection of the Omnibus was no longer needed.

So Frank proposed to at once proceed on their journey. To this the other travelers of course did not demur.

So leave was taken the Emir and the caravan.

Before leaving, however, the Emir gave them his private seal, which would insure their safety in any of the towns of the tribe.

But, as interpreted by Edgar, he also said:

"Beware of the region beyond. It is beyond my jurisdiction or that of my sultan. There are bad people there!"

Of course this warning was well heeded and duly appreciated, but it did not deter our travelers.

They were going to reach the Niger, and were determined that nothing should deter them.

Thus far they had certainly met with success, though it was fair to reflect that the journey had only just begun.

Then the explorers took leave of the caravan.

The Emir had also given them the most direct course to Berber, which they now proceeded to follow.

Up through the mountain pass the Omnibus threaded its way. For miles it crept through wild fastnesses and over rough ground.

None of the party had ever seen such rough and rocky wilds. The description of Inferno's portals called before it.

But there must be an end to all things, and finally the machine emerged from the Erkowitz Mountains and approached the Wady Goboot.

Here the course now became easier to follow.

But nightfall came on. Of course the search-light could have been utilized to continue travel but this was not deemed expedient.

"I think we had better camp," declared Frank, and the others agreed with him.

So a good spot was selected and camp was made. This was just in the shadow of a high precipice or cliff.

As darkness began to settle down, there was an excellent opportunity for the travelers to reflect upon their position.

The dreariness and loneliness of it all now came upon them full force. They knew that the region about them was full of all sorts of terrors.

Yet to give them credit, not one of them expressed an inclination to now turn back.

All were anxious to go ahead. But the night must pass before this could be done.

It was arranged that constant guard should be kept.

Barney was to be sentry for the first part of the night and Pomp for the latter.

All sat on deck until quite a late hour enjoying the balmy air. Then one by one they turned in.

Finally only Barney was left.

The Celt ensconced himself on the platform in front of the pilot-house. It could not be truly said that he was in love with his job.

The Stygian blackness about him was oppressive.

Far upon the mountain side a lion roared. Down in the valley jackals made the night hideous.

The Celt was armed with a Winchester and he had the valve of the search-light within easy reach so that he had really very little to fear.

But he feared just the same. He was really brave and it was nothing corporeal that he feared.

Who ever saw a genuine Irishman who is not superstitious.

Barney was no exception.

To him the dark shadows held the form of evil spirits, the cry of the jackal was a banshee's wail. And thus he allowed his imagination full play.

The hours passed slowly by. To him it seemed an eternity.

There was little danger that he would sleep at his post. He was staring wide awake and prepared for an emergency.

Twelve came and passed. At two o'clock he was to be relieved by Pomp. It seemed as if it would never come.

"Begorra, that naygur wud slape the eyes off a brass monkey!" he growled. "Shure, I'd loike to change places wid him."

Then, the words had barely left his lips when he gave a mighty start and clutched the butt of his rifle.

Saints and sinners! what did he see? Was that an earthly light or a ghastly manifestation?

Just beyond the rail two balls of fire hung suspended in the blackness. They gleamed and glowed like a graveyard light.

For a moment Barney was transfigured. He stared at the balls of fire like one bereft of senses.

Then a terrific bellow smote upon the night air. It fairly made the machine tremble.

"Saints presarve us!" gasped Barney, as he tumbled over backwards.

Over he went in a heap.

But he was on his feet in an instant, and dodged into the pilot house.

He slammed the door behind him. Then he had sense enough to pull the valve of the search-light.

The flood of light swept the gloom away as by magic, and there he beheld an astounding sight.

A huge yellow form stood upon a knoll not ten yards from the machine. The terrible eyes belonged to it.

It was a lion.

The king of beasts for a moment seemed blinded by the search-light. Barney gave a yell.

"Howly mither!" he cried. "Bad cess to the beast! Here's at yez!"

He opened the door of the pilot-house and fired.

The bullet by some strange chance struck a vital part. In a moment the huge beast was groveling in the sand. In another moment he was dead. Of course the shot aroused everybody aboard the machine.

All came rushing out in haste. But before Barney could explain, a glance told Frank the truth.

It was not deemed best to descend and ascertain the result of Barney's shot, though it was evident enough that it was fatal. He came in for hearty congratulations.

It was decided to let the lion lie there until morning, when its skin could be reclaimed. Barney was a jubilant mood.

"Begorra, it's not ivery wan as kin bag a lion the fust noight he spins in Afriky," he declared.

Which made Pomp a bit envious.

The darky now relieved the Celt and all retired to sleep the rest of the night.

Morning dawned bright and clear and all were astir early.

Pomp prepared a delicious morning meal. The lion yet lay where Barney had dropped him.

After breakfast a visit was paid him and his skin was deftly and skillfully removed. Then Frank announced all in readiness for the start.

"We must cross the Nile this afternoon," he declared, "it will be a quick run to El Salamanick, which is the little town at the Fifth Cataract."

"I hope your predictions will be verified," said Edgar. "I am anxious to get into the heart of the Soudan."

"So are we all of us," sang Walter.

The machine did make a quick run to El Salamanick.

Several caravans were met on the way, and a few villages were passed through.

But nothing was seen of any hostile Arabs. They had evidently been left behind.

They were now in the Province of Berber. There were indications of the tropical verdure of the upper Nile here visible. But yet not enough to obstruct their course.

Their first view of the Nile was from a slight eminence.

It was seen to be a broad and powerful river. This point was just above the cataract where the water was smooth and here it was that the crossing was made.

The natives in El Salamanick especially after being given the signal of the Emir of Derr were exceedingly friendly. With plenty of "hashish," they were willing to aid in towing the machine across.

Frank had designed the Omnibus to float in the water and also to propel itself through slowly with paddles fixed upon the rear wheels.

But for fear of being carried over the cataract, the precaution of strong ropes was employed.

It took the efforts of a hundred natives to get the Omnibus across the great river. But success crowned their effort and at last the Nile was crossed.

The incidents of the great journey had only just begun. The country before them to the Niger held more perils than they had ever dared dream of.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BEDOUINS.

THE Nile had been crossed, and our adventurers realized now that there could be no turning back.

They were in for the mighty task before them of traversing the country to the Niger and must not shrink.

The natives of El Salamanick were rewarded for their services, and then leave was taken of the fifth cataract of the Nile.

They were now in the verge of the Egyptian Soudan, and must cross the desert of Bayuda.

This was a part of Nubia and, though not so great in extent, was nevertheless quite as arid and lifeless as the Sahara.

Frank had outlined his course exactly upon the chart.

This was to proceed in a direct line to Lake Tchad, which was in the heart of Africa.

In doing this he must pass along through the edge of the Sahara, and through ruined cities and regions infested by desert pirates, Bedouins and the scum of Egyptian humanity.

It would have been possible to have traveled through this region in no other way.

Aboard the Omnibus they felt comparatively safe. On foot or in a caravan they would have been almost certain of being carried into horrible bondage if not of death.

The Omnibus made a quick run from the Nile to the verge of the Bayuda Desert.

Here, just at nightfall of the second day, camp was made.

Some strange looking and massive ruins were here, and it was in the verge of these that the Omnibus laid by for the night.

It was a moon-lit night—unlike the previous one, for there was a cloudless sky. The vast white plain of sand lay before them.

Thus far no sign of hostile natives had been seen.

Indeed, the desert seemed utterly uninhabited. There was little apprehension of an immediate attack from any foe.

So the spirits of all in the party were high. Barney and Pomp danced and sang, while the others conversed glibly.

Considerable speculation in regard to the ruins was indulged in.

"There are many of these ruined towns and cities between here and the west coast," declared Foss. "Who their inhabitants or builders were it is hard to say."

"Some branch of the Egyptian race," suggested Walter.

"No," replied Frank. "On the contrary, these people are believed to have been entirely different from the real Egyptian."

"While they did not excel the people of the Pharaohs in architecture and the arts, they were yet fully their equal. Certainly they must have been a powerful race one day."

"That is right," agreed Edgar, "there is a current opinion that some one of these places was the residence of the Queen of Sheba, spoken of in the history of Solomon. It is possible that many of the splendors of his temple came from this part of the world."

"The land of Ophir!" suggested Walter.

"It is not unlikely."

"At any rate," said Frank. "We shall doubtless find enough to interest us before we get through to Sierra Leone. What with old ruins and unexplored regions, we shall be well employed."

"Especially in fighting Arabs and wild beasts," declared Walter.

"You are right."

The night passed uneventfully. The next morning all were astir for an early start.

The air was close and suffocating. The sands of the desert fairly burned beneath the rays of the tropic sun.

But there were no jaded camels or over-ridden horses to drive. The Omnibus was always to be depended on, and heat and cold had little effect upon it.

So the start was made.

The Omnibus rolled out upon the sands of the pitiless desert. Of course progress was not so rapid as it would have been on a hard surface.

But the machine rolled lightly on over the glistening sands. And thus was the great journey well begun.

At length all signs of vegetation or human or animal life died out. Naught was about them but one boundless sea of sand, white and pitiless and shining. Truly it was a most extraordinary sight.

This alarmed Dane and Foss not a little and they sought Frank.

"Are you sure you have your bearings all right?" asked Foss, "you know it would be very easy to get lost in this desert."

"I have," replied Frank, coolly, "I advise you not to worry. I will take you across the desert all right."

"I believe you!" cried Walter.

This set all fears at rest and the Omnibus went on under Frank's guidance.

A whole day passed and yet the desert lay before them. Camp was made upon the gleaming sands, and the night, the first one, was spent upon the desert in real earnest.

When morning came almost the first thing Frank did was to sweep the horizon keenly. He beheld something which gave him a great start.

It was a distant black speck. It might have been an oasis, but it changed its base constantly.

And it also approached nearer and nearer to the Omnibus. Frank finally shrugged his shoulders and said:

"On my word, I believe we are going to have visitors."

"Visitors!" exclaimed Walter.

"Yes."

"Who, may I ask?"

"It is hard to say just yet; but I am inclined to believe that they are Bedouins."

All watched the approaching horsemen with interest now. It soon became apparent that they were indeed mounted men.

They had apparently sighted the machine, and were coming for it. As Frank was somewhat curious to know who they were, he did not attempt to run away from them.

But instead he brought the machine to a stop. Then the travelers waited the approach of the desert riders.

Nearer they drew, and now they could be distinguished plainly. It was seen that they differed vastly from the ordinary Arab.

They were a much wilder and more savage people. They carried keen yataghans and long rifles, but their equipments and garments were not nearly as fine as the Bedouins.

Foss regarded them with much interest for a time. Then he said:

"They are a gang of Dars and the sworn foe of the Bedouins. These two factions are always at war!"

"Then they may be friendly to us!" suggested Frank.

But Foss shook his head.

"Not a bit of it. They are more cunning and thievish than the Bedouins and less to be trusted. Keep your eyes open when you are in the company of a Dar."

"Then they inhabit this desert?"

"No, not exactly. They rule the country just beyond, which is in the edge of the Sahara. Encountering them here is pretty good evidence that we are near the end of the Bayuda Desert."

"I am not sorry for that," declared Frank, with which sentiment; all the others were in accord.

The Dars rode boldly and gracefully upon steeds nearly if not quite the equal of the Bedouins.

They seemed to regard the Omnibus with the sheerest of amazement and were evidently puzzled to make out its character.

Until within a hundred yards of the machine they rode at full speed. Then they checked their horses and drew up in line, sitting upon their steeds like veritable Centaurs.

Not one of the travelers but believed that there was a likelihood of serious trouble with these fellows.

They looked quarrelsome and aggressive. But they were somewhat puzzled by the queer vehicle before them.

Frank recognized the importance of cultivating this feeling, so he allowed sufficient time for a deep impression before opening a parley with them.

One of the Dars urged his horse almost to the side of the machine and made several sharp cries in Arabic. It was really a challenge.

Foss understood the words and at once interpreted them.

"He calls upon us to come out and show ourselves if we are not jackals. He demands it in the name of the Prophet."

"All right," said Frank, coolly; "by all means accommodate him."

"Then I will speak with him?"

"Yes."

Foss opened the pilot house door and stepped out on the platform. The savage horseman regarded him curiously. Then he flourished his yataghan and cried in Arabic:

"Dog of a Christian, what do you in the land of Mahomet the chosen?"

"We are travelers under the protection of the sultan," replied Foss.

The Dar laughed jeeringly.

"The sultan does not rule here," he declared. "We have no sovereign. We are the children of Mahomet, and of the free desert."

"But we have come here to do you no harm," replied Foss. "We would be glad to make friends."

The Dar drew himself up as if contaminated.

"Mahomet forbid!" he cried. "The Christian desecrates the holy soil of the people of the true prophet. The Christian invader must expect only death!"

"Then you will listen to no proposals of friendship?" asked Foss.

"The Christian who invades our land must die!" replied the Dar doggedly. "There is but one hope. If you turn back now and run with all speed for the Sultan's domains you may escape. If you go on you may expect death. This is the decree of the prophet."

Foss turned to Frank.

"You can see what we have to contend with," he said. "The religious intolerance here is something awful. We shall be opposed at every step. It remains for you to say whether we shall turn back or not."

Frank's eyes flashed.

"Turn back!" he exclaimed. "That is not my way. Do you think I will let a set of bigoted zealots like these heathens stand in our path? Not much!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE BATTLE WITH ARABS.

"THEN we shall have to fight our way through," declared Foss. "Let it be so then. I'll risk but that we can do it," said Frank, rigidly. "We came here in a friendly spirit. We will not fire the first shot. But we must not be oppressed."

Foss and Dane were delighted with this assertion.

"That is the right spirit, Frank," declared Walter, earnestly. "I am glad to see you take so resolute a stand."

"And I shall stand by it," declared Frank, "tell that heathen out there that he interferes with us at his own great risk. We are going through to the Niger and neither he nor his prophet shall stop us."

"Dat am de talk!" cried Pomp, as he did a double shuffle.

"Begorra, give it to der big blow! Shure he'll niver want more than wan dose av der electric gun!" averred Barney as he turned a handspring.

So Foss proceeded to convey this bit of defiance to the Dar. The latter was furious.

He caracoled his charger and rode once around the machine flourishing his yataghan furiously. Then he dashed back to his comrades.

The announcement evidently did not please them, for they made the air hideous with their cries. They then rode at full charge upon the Omnibus.

But Frank had started the machinery, and the big vehicle was thundering across the plain. Woe to the Dar who got in its path.

Frank had given orders not to fire upon the foe, though they were raining bullets upon the machine.

His plan was to simply run away from the Dars and not to cause bloodshed, unless it became strictly necessary.

This seemed easy enough as they had the level desert before them, and the horses of the Arabs could not hope to keep up with the Omnibus.

But the Dars were dead game and rode down upon the machine, determined to arrest its course and execute the vengeance of the prophet upon the invaders.

The prow of the Omnibus struck one of the horses.

In a moment steed and rider were picked up and hurled away over the sands. Another horse went under the wheels.

Frank touched a spring and some sharp blades flashed out from the hub of the machine. Woe to the luckless horse which came in contact with these. He would never gallop again.

The result was that the Dars were quickly hurled aside. They might as well have tried to stop a thunderbolt.

And the Omnibus went bowling away over the plain as if nothing had happened.

Of course the enraged Arabs gave chase. With wild yells and spurring their horses they dashed after the machine.

But they might as well have spared themselves the trouble.

It required but a brief space of time to satisfy them that they were out of the race entirely. The Omnibus fairly distanced them.

They would have been left out of sight altogether had the desert extended a ways further.

But a range of mountains suddenly loomed up before the travelers. They were intersected with green and fertile valleys.

At their base was a walled city. Indeed, the slopes and valleys could be seen to be cut up into vineyards and farms.

Here was a race of people of whom the civilized world knew nothing; nor did they know aught of the world beyond the desert.

"They must be Dars," said Walter. "Probably this is the home of those chaps we just had the encounter with."

"That is very true," agreed Edgar Foss. "These people are undoubtedly of the Dar nation. Perhaps they will give us a better reception."

"What shall we do?" asked Frank—"keep straight on?"

"We must do so," replied Edgar. "I don't believe we can get through those hills any other way."

"What if they object?"

The young explorer whistled with a serious frown.

"Then we must either go around them or fight our way through."

"How much further would it be to go around?" asked Frank.

"I should think it must be fully one hundred miles!"

"Then we will not go around," said Frank, grimly. "I will run the machine up close to the gates of that city and you can be spokes-man."

"All right!" agreed Edgar.

The city was right in the verge of the desert. Quite a number of the natives on foot and in the saddle were about as the Omnibus rolled up.

They were evidently astonished at the appearance of the machine and a sensation was created.

They fled before it, and the call of trumpets was heard from the city walls. Instantly the gates were closed.

Armed men appeared on the walls, the role of drums was heard and Edgar clutched Frank's arm.

"Look out!" he gasped. "Don't you see the cannon?"

Frank had not seen the half-dozen old cannons which were suddenly brought to view on the ramparts. A man with lighted match stood by each.

Now, if there was one thing in the world to be feared by the travelers, it was artillery.

A shot from a cannon might utterly demolish the Omnibus. While rifle balls were harmless. It was a most critical moment.

"Mercy on us!" exclaimed Frank; "if they fire on us now, we are lost."

"They certainly mean to! Look out! Too late!"

Boom!

One of the gunners had touched off his piece. There was a flash of fire and a solid shot struck the Omnibus.

For a moment it seemed as if the machine was going all to pieces. But it did not. Nor was it much harmed. The ball had struck the flag pole on the pilot-house at its base, and carried it away.

Beyond the jar and the loss of the pole and flag no serious harm was done. But it was a narrow escape.

Had the other guns been aimed right the machine would have certainly been demolished.

But two of them flashed in the pan. The others shot wild and the Omnibus was luckily spared.

To risk another volley was not Frank's purpose. He seized the wheel and ran the machine off to right angles and out of range.

"Whew!" he exclaimed, with 'pallid face, "that was a close call for us, boys."

"Be javers, it was an onmannerly thrick, bad cess to the omadhoums!" declared Barney.

"I done fink I'd pay 'em back in der own coin!" averred Pomp.

"That is what they deserve," cried Edgar, "there is no use in parleying with these heathens, Frank. Lay 'em out cold, and then they'll come to their senses."

Frank knew that it was certainly a surly and unmannerly thing for the Arabs to do. They might at least have given fair warning.

But he was learning that these people were not in any sense given to fair play.

They were cutthroats and heathens of the worst type. There was certainly no way but to deal with them in their own way.

The young inventor made up his mind to give the inhabitants of the desert city a sharp lesson.

He at once went below to the electric gun.

The Omnibus was brought about at such a point that he could get a line upon the cannon and yet keep out of range.

It was but a moment's work to place a bomb in the cylinder. Then he exhausted the air-chamber and pulled the valve.

There was a shock and a slight recoil. The projectile sped on its way.

It struck the wall fair and square. There was a terrific earthquake-like shock.

When the cloud of dust and debris settled not a gun was left on the city wall.

A breach in the wall large enough for an army to march through was created. Everywhere the Arabs were fleeing in terror.

Frank went back to the pilot house. He believed that one shot would be enough.

It certainly had rid them of the only thing they needed to fear, which was the cannon.

The city seemed to be thrown into an uproar.

People thronged the roof tops and soldiers scurried hither and thither. Then it was seen that they meditated coming to the attack.

"By Jove! they mean to tackle us, don't they!" said Walter.

"It looks like it!" agreed Frank.

"They may be sorry!"

"They certainly will!"

At this moment Edgar gave a cry and pointed out on the desert. A black speck was seen.

It was coming from the direction from which they had come. That it was the band of Dars there was no doubt. They were riding swiftly to reach the scene of action.

While Frank did not apprehend at any time but that he could easily defeat the Dars, nevertheless he was averse to becoming deeply embroiled with them.

It was not so graceful to run away, but perhaps on the whole wiser and better.

So he decided to cut around the city and make a strike for the pass in the hills. Beyond them they must strike the lower verge of the Great Sahara.

He announced this determination to the others. But Edgar said:

"I'll wager we'll find that pass full of armed men. They are laying for us you may be sure."

However, the Omnibus passed around the northern end of the walled city.

But here in a narrow part of the road they were astounded to find a large band of the Arabs drawn up in battle array.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN THE GREAT SAHARA.

It was certain that the Arabs meant to oppose the advance of the invaders in most desperate fashion.

Their strict notions of religion and hatred of foreigners was the very good reason for this.

It was certain that they meant to stop the machine if they could. To do this, however, they were bound to learn was no easy task.

Frank grimly held the wheel and headed the Omnibus straight for them.

Bullets were flying thick and fast. They rattled upon the shell of the machine like hail.

But this did no harm.

There was no visible way to avoid running plump into the opposing force. Upon either side were high walls of stone and ledge.

It was important to clear the way at once to the pass. At this moment another incentive was added and a thrilling one it was, too.

Up one of the streets of the town a party of soldiers were coming on the double quick, and they were hauling a field piece.

Once this was trained upon the Omnibus the end would come swift and sure.

But Frank saw this peril, and put on the full force of the dynamoes.

The Omnibus went thundering down upon the Arabs.

Then followed a scene which baffles description.

The desperate valor of the Dars was remarkable. They were perfectly willing to throw away their lives.

They threw themselves in the path of the machine, clutched the wheels, and tried in every way to stay its progress.

But in this they failed.

Frank threw out the keen blades on the hubs, and the machine cut its way through like a knife through cheese.

Clearing the desperate gang, the Omnibus ran on toward the pass in the hills.

The field piece being trained, boomed in their rear. A cannon ball came, tearing the turf behind them, but it did not reach the Omnibus.

The travelers could not help a rousing cheer at their success. And Edgar Foss cried:

"Why, nothing can stop the Omnibus so long as we keep clear of heavy guns. I tell you we shall reach the Niger in spite of them!"

"You are right we will!" cried Walter, exultantly. "I don't see what will prevent us."

"Don't be too sure of it," admonished Frank, "it is a good long ways yet to the Niger, and we have many obstacles and dangers to encounter."

"That is true," agreed Edgar, "but if we master them all as we have those thus far we will succeed."

"We will hope to do so," said Frank.

The Omnibus reached the pass in the mountains safely. Some opposition was made by mounted Arabs on the way.

Riding into the pass some of them tried to roll up huge boulders, and block the wheels of the huge vehicle.

But a single shell from the dynamite gun reduced these obstructions to powder.

The run through the pass was a long one and the way a devious one. But at length the sands of the great Sahara burst into view on the other side.

The travelers all felt overjoyed at this, for the land of the Dars was left behind, and they would now enter upon a different region and were so much nearer the consummation of the long journey to the Niger.

On the Omnibus ran at full speed. When night came again they were full fifty miles out upon the Sahara and all was sand about them.

As the machine was traveling along thus suddenly Edgar cried:

"Look! That is the result of traveling in the Great Desert."

All saw the cause of his remark, and gazed with curious sensations upon it.

As far as the eye could reach to the eastward upon the great waste there was stretched a line of bones.

White and glistening they were in the hot rays of the sun.

There were human skeletons alongside those of camels and horses. The sequel was easy to read.

"Some caravan overtaken by the simoon has perished here," declared the young explorer.

"Whew, that is terrible!" said Walter Dane.

"Beggara, an' eudn't they make the mountains afore it cnm down onto them?" asked Barney.

"Ah!" exclaimed Edgar; "none of you know what a terrible thing the deadly simoon of the desert is."

"Phwat is it loike?"

"It is a fearful whirling cloud of sand and hot stifling air. It enfolds its victims like a deadly blanket and smothers them as they struggle in its embrace. It is the poisonous hot air and driving dust that does the work."

It was certainly a fearful thing to reflect upon that all these people had thus passed into oblivion and their fate was unknown to friends in some far away land.

For doubtless many feet of sand had covered these bones for perhaps half a century only to uncover them now, with some driving wind storm.

Who they were, what the freight they carried, what their destination must forever remain a mystery.

The bones of the caravan were passed by, and then not a dozen miles further on, another wonder of the desert was encountered.

This was a buried temple covering acres of territory. Only the upper columns and roof were visible.

The balance of the structure was deep in the sands.

For centuries these had drifted about the structure until at length it was entirely covered up.

"This is an illustration of how the surface of the desert constantly changes," said Edgar; "it is really hard to say where its original level was."

"Or what nations may be buried beneath it," said Frank.

"You are right!"

The Omnibus left the buried temple and now the day began to draw to a close.

It was necessary now to look for a good place to make camp. This seemed not at hand.

All were weary of the desolate expanse of sand. Moreover, the heat was intolerable and fine particles of dust had thoroughly permeated the cabin and gave all a distressing cough.

"Oh, for an oasis!" cried Walter, "is there no such thing in view?"

"I fear not!" declared Edgar. "Indeed it would seem good to see a bit of green now!"

Frank took his glass and went on to the upper deck.

He swept the horizon closely with it. The light was a trifle dim and there was a haze in the air.

But suddenly he cried:

"Your prayers are answered."

Edgar and Walter gave cries of joy.

"Is that true?" cried the young explorer. "Where is it?"

"Look yonder!"

A dark spot was seen just where the sky and the plain met. It might have been a blot upon a brass shield.

But the travelers knew well enough what it was.

"An oasis!" cried young Foss. "Hurrah! that is joyful news."

The spirits of all arose. The machine held down for the distant breathing spot in the great desert.

Soon the waving palms could be seen, and then beautiful as a poet's dream the scene lay before them.

Already they could scent the fresh foliage and it was an intense relief to their dust burdened nostrils.

Every moment they drew nearer to the oasis.

But darkness was close at hand. Indeed, even as the Omnibus drew up in the verge of the little clump of palms little could be seen of them in detail.

The glare of the search-light showed a wooded dell, with a trickling spring of deliciously cool water.

All wanted to slake their thirst at this spring, but Frank did not think it best to leave the machine until daylight.

So the tour of exploration was postponed. All retired comparatively early, for the incidents of the day had fatigued them greatly.

They slept soundly, for the cool air from the oasis was most refreshing and rest inducing.

The next morning all were astir early, and the oasis now lay before them in the light of the sun.

How rich and healthful, how fresh and beautiful, the green depths looked in contrast with the sands of the mighty desert.

The travelers, two by two, were permitted to stroll through the oasis.

There were paths made by visiting caravans, and also many water bottles were found. It was a regular stopping place for desert travelers doubtless.

But they were at the time the sole visitors.

They did not linger long, however, for Frank was anxious to be once more on the way.

So once more the Omnibus was rolling away over the sandy waste. The little oasis which had cheered many a thirsty traveler was left far behind.

They had left the Dar Mountains far behind, and were now in the land of the Wady Arabs.

A long and arduous trip was before them to the northern shores of Lake Tchad.

During all these days of lonely traveling over the Sahara, no incident worthy of note occurred.

But the machine looked as if it had been through a sand storm.

The dust was inches deep on all its decks, and even encrusted on the hull.

Certainly the travelers themselves had ample reason for complaint, for their nostrils and lungs were filled.

CHAPTER IX.

AT LAKE TCHAD.

THE journey had begun to wax monotonous.

"I don't care if I never see this confounded Sahara again!" declared Walter Dane in disgust.

"I think we are all well sick of it," agreed Frank Reade, Jr., "but we shall soon be out of it."

"Do you mean it?"

All looked up eagerly with this delicious announcement.

"Yes, I do," replied Frank; "for in a few hours we shall reach Njimi, a town near Lake Tchad."

"Hurrah!" was the answer.

"Beyond Lake Tchad," declared Frank, "we shall strike down into a far different country. We shall then invade genuine Ethiopia."

"And see no more of the Arabs?" asked Walter.

"That is true," declared Edgar. "We shall soon be in a country with which I am well familiar. We shall have to do after this with black men instead of desert heathens."

"For which I am devoutly glad," declared Walter, sincerely. And all showed the sentiment.

Frank's prediction was verified.

Already a dark line had begun to appear beyond the sandy waste. That this was a line of vegetation there was no doubt.

About Lake Tchad the mighty forests of Ethiopia begin. The desert gives way to fertile savannas, mighty river courses and the wildest of Africa's unexplored heart.

Here the Arab gives way to the black man.

Below this line the desert wanderer never ventures, save to procure slaves for Morocco or Algiers.

It was not Frank's intention to visit Lake Tchad.

He was purposed to pass just to the northward of it. Thence he intended going on in a straight line for the Niger.

This would take the travelers through the northern part of tropical Africa. It would certainly be a relief from the arid deserts of the Soudan.

So the machine kept on until finally forests took the place of the sandy plain, and eventually prairies of bunch grass were entered upon.

Here there were evidences of animal and bird life such as is peculiar to tropical Africa.

In the jungle the striped skin of the tiger was seen to flash; the roar of the lion made the ground tremble, and the tall giraffe fled at the approach of the Omnibus.

There was a complete change of scene. But no one in the party felt sorry for it.

Beautiful pheasants could be shot in any coppice. There were little wood-deer also for the sportsman to try his skill upon.

It was a wonderful region which now opened before our travelers.

They encountered some prowling tribes of blacks. All however were friendly, and even too much so, it being necessary to keep them at arm's length for the safety of all portable articles on board the Omnibus.

For the native negro will steal, it being his untaught nature to do so. Otherwise he is not a bad savage.

But what aroused the spirits of all to the point of virtuous indignation, was the meeting with unscrupulous gangs of Arab and Portuguese slave traders.

These not only bartered with the kings of the various tribes, for slaves but made descents upon unprotected villages and captured the helpless natives.

The Americans with true national spirit were much against this most infamous practice.

"They ought to be garroted, the whole fiendish crew of them!" declared Walter Dane, indignantly.

"That is right," agreed Edgar; "if we could only catch them sacking a native village—"

"If we could, we would make it serious for them," declared Frank. "I wouldn't hesitate to open fire on the rascally wretches!"

The words were hardly off his lips when Barney gave a startled cry.

The Celt was in the pilot house. The Omnibus had been proceeding at a slow speed through a brushy tract of country.

Suddenly from a copse a black came staggering out.

He was bleeding from a dozen wounds and fell half senseless upon the green sward. It was evident that he had run a good ways and was about beat out.

"Whoa!" shouted Frank, "hold up, Barney. We must help that poor fellow!"

The black lay panting upon the ground. Frank with Edgar and Walter reached his side.

They lifted his head and saw at once the stamp of death upon his brow.

Edgar gave one glance at him and said:

"He is a Mokato. They are a peaceful and gifted people and live in a valley below here. This is the work of slave traders."

Frank gave an exclamation of horror and anger.

"Are you sure of that, Edgar?" he asked.

"I will make sure of it by asking the poor fellow," said Foss; "I have a smattering of their tongue."

So in a guttural tone he asked the dying man several questions. The black's face lit up and he seemed to revive.

His answers were interpreted by the young explorer. They filled the breasts of all with horror.

"He says that his village is but a few miles from here in the direction he came from," said Foss; "they were attacked early this morning by Portuguese and a wholesale slaughter of women and children was made. Also their best young men were carried into captivity."

"Enough," said Frank, "we will see that vengeance is done. They shall have their punishment."

The fugitive black man lived but a short while after this.

After he was dead a grave was prepared for him. Then Frank Reade, Jr. proceeded to carry out his avowed purpose.

The Omnibus was headed in the direction of the Mokato village.

Long before it was reached evidences of the bloody work of the slave traders were to be found in plenty.

Dead bodies of the fugitive blacks strewed the pathway. There was a literal trail of blood to the native village.

Before the Omnibus arrived there sounds of the carnage were still heard. The crack of rifles and savage cries.

Every man on board was armed with a rifle. Frank stood grimly at the key board while Barney held the wheel.

The Omnibus went crashing through undergrowth into a clearing.

The scene which met the gaze of all was a sickening one.

There were the conical huts of the Africans made of straw and bamboo all in flames.

Heaps of dead natives lay upon the ground. Some of their bodies were roasting in the flames.

While just at the north of the clearing a band of full two hundred armed white men were firing volleys into the village.

Back of them was a cowering line of blacks all chained together ready for the slave market. It was a sight to arouse the very soul of any Christian man.

Horrified, the Omnibus travelers gazed upon the scene for a moment. Then the firing ceased.

The slave traders had turned with amazement to regard the vehicle. It was plain that they were much astonished at its appearance.

The Omnibus ran up to within fifty yards of the spot. Then Frank went out on the platform.

He understood Portuguese well, so had no difficulty in making the villains understand him.

"Hello!" he shouted. "What are you trying to do here? Who are you?"

The reply came back in a sullen and terse way:

"Keep your own counsel, senors with the wagon, we can keep ours!"

"Can you?" retorted Frank. "You can also give a civil answer or pay the penalty."

"We don't fear the penalty," was the sneering reply. "We want no parley with you. We know you Americans and warn you not to meddle with Manuel Garcia or his men."

"I'll show you what meddling is, on the American method," declared Frank. "You contemptible villains, to come here and desolate a defenseless community of human beings like this. Have you no souls?"

At this a tall, brutal-looking Portuguese became spokesman.

"Senor Americano," he said, roughly, "you will not dare meddle with Manuel Garcia. We are pursuing the lawful business of securing slaves. It may be illegal in America, but this is not America."

"I don't care what country it is," retorted Frank. "Right is right the world over and can never be aught else. You must deliver up those poor wretches in chains there, and take a vow never to indulge in this nefarious traffic again or I will wipe you out of existence."

Hot and furious was the reply of the slave-trader.

"Senor Americano, can indulge in good bluster," he declared, "but remember that we have the superior force. Go on about your affairs or we'll pull you out of your wagon and hang you to the nearest tree."

"Once more," said Frank, "will you liberate those poor souls?"

"Do you think I'm a fool?" came back the taunting reply.

"You will be a fool if you do not comply," said Frank. "Listen, Senor Manuel Garcia—I have a dynamite gun here, one charge from which will blow you and your gang into perdition! I shall not hesitate to use it, and massacre you for a lot of red-handed murderers! Now will you liberate those poor blacks?"

But the Portuguese captain only laughed jeeringly. He put up his right hand.

A revolver gleamed in it.

"Get in out of there!" he cried, coarsely, "or I'll blow daylight through you for such an insult! The law will defend me in it!"

CHAPTER X.

IN THE SOKOTO FOREST.

FRANK did an injudicious thing. It might have cost him his life. He refused to comply with the villain's command. He remained on the platform.

Very deliberately the villain aimed and pulled the trigger.

Crack!

Had the aim been good that would have been Frank's last hour on earth. But it was not.

The bullet grazed his shoulder and caused him to stagger. The cowardly trick was seen by all in the cabin, and it created a violent sensation.

"Kill him! Kill the cowardly murderer!" was the cry.

Barney and Pomp already had a line upon Garcia. The next moment retribution had achieved its end.

Swift and sure was the fate which overtook the desperado. He fell pierced to the heart.

For a moment there was a lull. Then a roar of rage escaped the slave traders.

War had been declared and war to the death. The slave traders were a terribly vindictive and merciless gang.

They meant to kill all on board the Omnibus. But they had reckoned without a host.

They fired a volley at the vehicle. Barney and Pomp with Edgar and Walter returned it.

The Portuguese fell before this withering fire. But still they came on to the attack.

They were in great force and once aboard the Omnibus might have done much harm.

But Frank did not intend that they should come to close quarters.

He went below and sighted the electric gun.

He knew that it would be frightful carnage. But somehow he could not feel compunction.

It was like firing into a pack of wolves. He could feel only that these men were the basest of murderers and ruffians and deserved death. It could be no sin to kill them.

So he sighted the gun and pressed the button. The bomb was driven into the midst of the murderous gang. The result was tremendous.

It seemed as if fully a third of the murderous band expiated their sins in that moment.

They were literally blown to atoms. The remnant of the gang waited not for another bomb but fled incontinently.

But Frank sent another after them, and indeed continued to shell the forest about until he was satisfied that the terrified villains would never dare return.

Then he threw open the Omnibus doors and leaped out, followed by Edgar and Walter.

They rushed up to the line of cowering slaves.

It was but brief work to unlock their shackles and set them free.

So overjoyed were they, that they groveled at the feet of their liberators. One of them was the chief Mokato and he could talk a bit of Portuguese.

Frank conversed with him and learned the whole horrible truth.

Garcia and his gang had been raiding the tribe for years, carrying off their best young men.

When Mokato finally objected he brought the large force in revenge to wipe out the whole tribe.

But he had been wiped out himself by a merciful interposition of Providence.

Frank comforted the aged chief and the Omnibus remained at the Mokato village for three days.

In that time the village was once more put to rights, a large number of the people who had fled into the jungle came back and the dead were buried.

One thing was sure. They need never fear Garcia any more.

When the Omnibus took its leave of Mokato, it left a joyful community of thanksgiving blacks behind it.

Once more the Omnibus was headed toward the Niger.

The country now became swampy and full of lakes and rivers. This made progress very slow.

The ferrying of the streams was a slow and somewhat dangerous operation. Much of this now came.

This took up time, and weeks were consumed in crossing a small stretch of country.

Thus far no hostile blacks had been met with.

But there were reports of the Sokotos, a tribe of man-eaters, who lived in a very deep and dark forest through which the Omnibus must pass.

The travelers looked forward to this stretch of forest, which was described as fully as wild as the selvas of the Amazon, with much interest and apprehension.

It covered a mighty tract, and to go around it would involve too great a detour.

There was but one logical plan, and this was to go straight through it. So they decided.

Two days later they had left the region of Lake Tchad far behind and were bearing more to the south.

After crossing a mountainous tract one day the great Sokoto forest came into view. They gazed upon the scene with much wonderment.

The trees of which the forest was composed were of mighty proportions. So heavy were their tops overgrown with clinging vines that in the deepest recesses the light of day was almost shut out.

It was traveling through a semi-gloom. Looking up, one saw that great green canopy like a huge tent over all.

Monkeys and apes abounded. Their chattering could be heard a great distance. Neither did they seem much afraid of the invaders.

Also there were huge pythons, which wound their huge folds about the limbs of trees and waited for their victims to pass beneath that they might pounce upon them.

In this Sokoto forest dwelt the mysterious race of man-eaters whose name was a synonym of terror the country over.

Many wild and weird tales were told of them, and the fate of luckless travelers who had fallen into their clutches.

Of course all this did not deter our adventurers, but rather added a zest to their enterprise.

It was at times difficult to find a path through the Great Forest.

There were many dense thickets and jungles through which it became necessary for them to literally cut their way.

Huge serpents were sometimes crushed beneath the wheels, giant tarantulas and various poisonous insects swarmed in the foliage.

All these would have been a deadly peril for the travelers to face had they been on foot.

But, protected by the fine net work which covered the sides of the wagon, they were comparatively safe. Yet occasionally a tarantula made an appearance in the cabin.

At such a time he generally became for the time being, monarch of all he surveyed, and remained so until someone was valiant enough to attack and dispatch him.

But these deadly pests were only found in certain sections of the forest.

Fortunately there were other sections entirely free from them.

Also at times the machine halted in lovely little glades, where the sunlight was admitted, and some trickling stream found its way over mossy stones.

And thus the journey through the African forest went on.

No serious incident occurred, until one day a stop was made just before an intensely thick jungle through which it would be necessary to cut a way.

This was usually done by throwing out the keen knives on the hubs and putting on all speed.

They would cut the bamboo like pipe stems, and the pilot on foot, being also armed with knives, would do the same.

But this patch of jungle seemed to be unusually thick. Frank noted this and said to Edgar:

"I don't know but what we shall have trouble to get through there."

"It looks pretty thick," agreed the young explorer. "Is there no way to go around it?"

"None that I can see. However, here goes for the attempt. Great Scott!"

Frank was just about to press the motor lever. He instantly drew back his hand as he gave this startled cry.

Both men saw at that moment a thrilling spectacle.

From the depths of the jungle there had emerged a giant form. It was a nondescript creature, as large and as powerful as an ox and plainly half man, half beast.

"The gorilla!" gasped Foss. "Mercy on us! I never saw so big a one as that!"

Something like sense of terror seized upon them as they regarded the mighty beast.

Truly he was a monster. His leviathan arms covered with hair hung below his knees, his neck short and thick supported a receding skull and the most wolfish, fiendish face ever seen.

Great fangs hung from the creature's mouth, and it stood blinking savagely at the Omnibus.

Both Frank and Edgar had seen gorillas before, but never such a specimen as this. Words cannot avail to describe him.

Indeed he seemed powerful enough to shoulder an elephant. There was no doubt but that he could do great harm to the machine.

"Mither preserve us!" gasped Barney, with pallid face. "Shure, did yez iver see the loikes av him."

"Wha' de debbil am it?" stuttered Pomp, "sho' if it ain' de ole fiend hisself cum fo' us all."

"Well!" said Edgar, with a short whistle, "it's certainly the biggest gorilla that I ever saw. I am glad that we are all behind these steel walls!"

While the travelers were wondering what move the huge beast would make another made its appearance.

It was fully as large and hideous. A moment later the third burst from the jungle, and then a fourth was seen.

This was enough for Frank Reade, Jr., who was at once much alarmed.

CHAPTER XI.

A GREWSOME FETE.

"MERCY on us!" he cried. "We have run into a literal nest of them. How terrible!"

"I think we had better get out of here the quickest way!" suggested Edgar in alarm.

"So do I."

It might be easy enough to dispose of one of these giants. But an army of them would be a difficult matter.

Frank knew this well.

No ordinary rifle shot would be apt to kill one of them, unless it happened to strike just the right spot.

Their skins were as tough as leather and could almost shed rifle balls.

But the moment the Omnibus moved backward the gorillas changed their attitude, which had been apparently one of curiosity.

They towered aloft in fearful rage and filled the air with hoarse cries.

"Look out!" cried Frank; "they are coming to the attack!"

"Don't let them get the start!" cried Edgar, seizing a rifle. "Give it to them!"

Barney and Pomp and Walter needed no second bidding.

It was impossible to train the electric gun upon the big brutes. Nothing but the rifle could be used.

But this was used well. Shot after shot was fired at the advancing gorillas.

But this seemed only to madden them more. They came on with more speed.

Frank was running the Omnibus backward as fast as he could. Of course this was none too fast, as the forest road was not very smooth.

But it kept the gorillas from getting aboard.

"Confound them!" cried Edgar in disgust; "these rifle balls don't seem to have any more effect upon them than peas!"

"That's right," agreed Walter, "there's one fellow whom I have plumped square in the forehead three times. But the bullet slides off and don't even stun him."

"Fire at their legs!" suggested Frank; "if you can break a bone it will check them."

This was successful advice.

In a few moments two of the gorillas were hors-du-combat. They sank down with furious yells.

The effect upon the others was singular.

At once they stopped and began apparently ministering to the wounds of their comrades.

This gave the Omnibus a chance to make a good retreat.

And this was certainly the best thing under the circumstances, for it could be seen already that more of the gorillas were coming from the woods.

There seemed to be a literal colony of them there. It was an astonishing fact.

Frank let the Omnibus run back for fully five miles. Then their course was changed to the southward.

This cost them a day of extra time, but the adventurers were more than glad to get away from the unwelcome society of the gorillas.

Nothing more was seen of them, however. But in changing their course the explorers ran directly from one danger into another.

The black natives of the forest thus far had not been encountered. Indeed the travelers had almost begun to believe them a myth. But this conclusion was dispelled in a rude manner.

The machine ran suddenly into a great clearing. In this was located the village of the man-eaters.

Frank saw this when it was too late to draw up. He reversed the machinery but it brought the Omnibus to a standstill not one hundred yards from the village.

The result can hardly be described in words.

Of course the village was thrown into a state of confusion and excitement.

There was the loud banging of tom-toms and the shrill notes of reed instruments as the Sokotos beat to arms.

They came pouring in a vast body from their conical huts of bamboo and plantain. All were armed with javelins and bows.

That the Omnibus was a sight the like of which they had never before seen was evident. For a time they did little else but stare at it.

Powerful, savage looking fellows they were, and black as midnight.

They seemed to differ from the general race of Africans in the fact that all had curious wolf fangs protruding from their upper jaws, being in fact sheer evidence of their carnivorous habits.

So astonished were the adventurers that Frank did nothing to effect a retreat from the predicament. All gazed spellbound at the man eaters.

"They are more beast than human," declared Foss. "No wonder they are man eaters."

"That's right," agreed Walter. "What terrible fangs they have!"

"Do you really believe they are cannibals?" asked Frank, incredulously.

"They have that reputation."

"May it not be their animal-like appearance that suggests it."

"Possibly!"

"One thing is certain!" declared Walter, "they are warlike and don't seem disposed to be friendly."

"We will make overtures and see!" declared Frank.

It was not known whether a white flag would be understood by the Sokotos or not. But Pomp stepped out on the platform with one.

The appearance of a man of their own color aboard the Omnibus seemed to have a conciliatory effect upon the man-eaters.

They desisted for a moment in their war-like demonstrations. Then one of them advanced with his hands up in token of amity.

"They want to parley!" cried Frank; "perhaps after all their appearances belie them."

"But who will talk with them?" cried Edgar.

This was a question.

Of course none in the party understood the tongue of the Sokotos. The truce bearer addressed Pomp in some sort of gibberish which he did not understand.

Pomp replied to him in English. But both were stumped.

The darky turned in disgust and cried:

"I jes' can't make dem understand' at all, Marse Frank."

"Have yez forgotten yer ancestral tongue?" asked Barney, mischievously.

"Don' yo' gib me no sass, I'ish!" sputtered Pomp.

Frank next went out and tried sign talk with the Sokoto envoy. It had its effect.

In this way Frank was able to convey his expressions of good will. The Sokotos seemed inclined to reciprocate.

As well as sign talk could do it, the envoy assured the visitors that they were welcome and desired them to come into the village.

A deputation of chiefs next came out with peaceful assurances. Frank was triumphant.

"What did I tell you?" he cried. "We shall find these people very likely some of the most friendly on the route. We will accept their invitation and stay here a day."

"Good!" cried Edgar. "I shall avail myself of the opportunity to study their habits and customs."

"I'm with you," agreed Walter.

So the Omnibus was sent forward a trifle and right into the village. The reception given by the Sokotos seemed to be cordial.

Indeed they became effusive in their manners, and the chief of the village gave orders for a fete in honor of their visitors.

Great numbers of the Sokotos hastened to brush the streets of the little village, and the women proceeded to decorate everything with palm leaves.

A great heap of wood like a funeral pyre was placed in the center of the village. Above this all of the natives congregated.

This first excited the curiosity of the travelers.

"What the dickens is that for?" exclaimed Walter.

"It looks as if they were going to make some sort of a sacrifice," said Edgar. "What if it should be a human one?"

"I cannot believe that," dissented Frank. "You will see them roasting a fat pig or a deer there yet. They are giving a feast in our honor."

Both Edgar and Walter made a grimace, for they could not relinquish the belief that these natives were really man-eaters.

The question was soon settled.

A number of long iron forks were brought out. Each had a prong. Then the wood pyre was fired.

All the head men of the tribe seated themselves about in a circle. Then the flap of one of the huts was removed.

Out of the dwelling two human beings were led.

They were stark naked.

One was a man and the other a woman. It could be seen that they were not of the Sokoto tribe.

They were led close to the burning pyre. Then our travelers for the first time comprehended what was up.

A fearful cry of horror escaped the lips of Edgar Foss.

"What did I tell you?" he cried, "they are cannibals and these are to be their victims."

"What!" gasped Frank, "do they really mean to cook those poor wretches?"

"That is certainly their purpose, and they will be cooked alive upon the prongs of those big iron forks. Mark my words!"

"Never!" cried the young inventor, excitedly. "I could not stand by and witness so horrible a thing!"

"What can we do to prevent it?"

"We must prevent it. I tell you innocent life must not be taken in so ruthless a manner. Not if I have to blow those fiends to atoms!"

With which Frank rushed out upon the platform and shouted at the top of his lungs for the human fiends to desist.

Words can hardly describe the effect of this upon the Sokotos.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE JOURNEY.

OF course Frank's action interrupted proceedings, and he was none too soon.

The wretches were about to spit the two victims and place them on the huge iron forks to roast over the fire.

But all paused and regarded Frank in amazement.

The young inventor continued to protest vigorously, whereat one of the Sokoto chiefs advanced and attempted to explain matters.

He placed his fingers upon the ribs of the victims, and then to his mouth, smacking his lips with apparent relish.

But to his surprise Frank only objected all the more.

For a time a sensation was created. All the Sokotos crowded about the Omnibus.

It was no easy matter for Frank to convey to the cannibals his opinion that it was wrong for them to kill and eat a human being.

Indeed it became a sheer impossibility, and after much useless effort he saw its futility.

Edgar, who stood by him, said:

"It's no use, Frank. You can't make them see it."

"But what shall I do?" exclaimed the young inventor in despair. "I can't see the poor wretches die!"

"Yet there is nothing you can do except to take the victims from them by force. This will necessitate killing a score or more of the Sokotos, which will be worse."

This was true. But Frank would not abandon the point. He tried to temporize with the cannibals and get the victims from them in barter.

This dodge proved successful.

For a few trinkets bestowed upon the head-man of the tribe, he secured the prisoners.

Doubtless the Sokotos fancied that the white man wanted the victims for a feast of his own. So they took the breaking up of the banquet in a philosophical manner.

The two rescued blacks were taken aboard the Omnibus. So overcome were they with joy, that they fell down upon their faces before their deliverers.

But little time further was wasted with the man-eaters.

The travelers encountered no more thrilling adventures during the rest of the journey through the Sokoto Forest.

Beyond this forest it was not more than three hundred miles to the banks of the Niger.

The journey was nearing its end.

Here the travelers would encounter civilization, and the balance of the trip would be without special interest.

But they were by no means out of the perilous regions as yet.

Beyond the Sokoto forests and contiguous to the Niger was a tract of country inhabited by a savage race of giants.

These men were of a lighter hue than the regular African, being more on the chocolate shade. But in all Africa their equal could not be found.

No travelers or explorers could ever be induced to venture into the land of the Sokoto giants.

If they did the chances were that they would not come out alive.

The daring slave traders even shunned this region.

The Omnibus travelers could have made a detour to the south for a hundred miles and evaded the hostile region.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was much opposed to this.

"I am going right through to the Niger!" he declared. "We have paused for no obstacles as yet and it is a poor time to begin now!"

"I like your spunk!" declared Edgar. "So far as I am concerned I have no fears!"

"Nor I!" declared Walter Dane.

So the Omnibus went on its way. Soon they were over the boundary.

The land of the Giants probably is without a parallel on the face of the globe.

While there were no very high mountains, its surface was so rough and cut up that it was a literal Inferno.

It was a land of dens and caverns.

At every hand there yawned some deep fissure in the earth, and

lions and jackals were everywhere, for they had good hiding-places in these caves.

Also the caves furnished abodes for the Sokoto giants. Scarcely one of these but had one or more occupants.

So it could be seen at once that the party had something lively in prospect. To pass through this region with the Omnibus would be no slight task.

There were but narrow passes for the machine to make its way through. In any one of these it seemed as if one man could easily hold an army at bay.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was not daunted by all these obstacles. He was determined to pass through the region and so kept straight on.

It proved the most difficult feat of the whole trip. Soon the machine was treading its way through one of the narrow passes.

The day was a dark and gloomy one, and there seemed great shadows hanging over the Omnibus in a threatening way.

The travelers were congregated in the pilot house anxiously watching for some demonstration upon the part of the terrible giants.

Thus far none of them had been seen. There was no evidence of life but lions and jackals.

The lions seemed as devoid of courage as the jackals, and invariably fled when the machine appeared on the scene.

But when the giants did make an appearance it was in a manner which the travelers never forgot.

Suddenly Edgar clutched Frank's arm, and gasped: "Look!"

He pointed to a high spur of rock just ahead. Prominent upon it, and outlined against the sky was one of the giants.

And he was a giant too. In all their lives the travelers had never seen so powerful a man.

He was a perfect Samson in build.

He was entirely naked save a breech clout.

He carried a prodigious club and a javelin in his hand. He was regarding the machine with apparent earnestness.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed the young inventor; "that is one of them!"

"Yes."

"Well, he is a giant!"

"You are right!"

"And he sees us!"

"True!"

Frank held the wheel steadily, while the machine every moment drew nearer to the spur of rock.

It was necessary to pass directly under it.

Frank hesitated.

Should he come to a halt and attempt to open a parley? On second thought he decided to keep on.

And keep on he did. The next moment the machine was under the spur of rock. The giant was twenty feet above.

But he leaped down on the deck of the vehicle like a panther. His weight gave the Omnibus a tremendous jar.

The moment he struck the deck he whirled his club aloft and gave the pilot house a tremendous whack. For a moment it seemed as if it must come to pieces.

"Heavens!" screamed Edgar, "he will batter the machine all to pieces. Wing him, somebody!"

"Begorra I will!"

Another blow shattered one of the powerful glasses in the pilot house. Then Barney was at a loophole. He fired at almost point blank range.

The next moment there was one giant less in Africa.

He could not withstand a bullet and went off the top of the machine like a lump of lead.

But this was not all.

Other giants had appeared in the pass. Several of them lay hold of the machine and tried to stop it.

Others far ahead began to roll huge rocks into the pass. It was a lively time.

It seemed certain that the huge brutes did not mean that the machine should pass safely through their country.

But Frank Reade, Jr., with his customary ready wit was at the fore. He threw out the knives on the hubs.

After several of the giants had been deliciously carved, the others were willing to relinquish their purpose.

Then Frank gave the wheel to Barney.

He ran to the electric gun and sighted it. He sent a bomb tearing up the pass.

It reduced the stone obstructions to powder, and dispersed the rest of the giants. In a brief moment the victory was won.

The machine went tearing on up the pass, and eventually the giants were left far behind.

But the trip through giant land was ever after to all of them like a childhood tale from a story book.

The wild broken country, the deep caverns, the savage beasts, and the hideous giants could hardly seem to be a reality.

But they certainly were, and many exciting scrapes were had with them before the Omnibus party got safely through.

Giant-land was left behind and now the machine encountered a magnificent level stretch of country.

The travelers could not help but admire it, and Frank declared: "Some day these lands will be claimed by the forces of civilization, and these will be the richest farms in the world."

"You are right," agreed Edgar Foss, "the day will not be far distant either."

"There is a great future for Africa."

"Certainly! With its undeveloped resources it is equaled by no other country in the world."

The Omnibus camped that night upon the pebbly shores of a lake.

The next day it was seen to be full of myriads of fish. This was too great a temptation.

The sportsman proclivities of the crowd manifested itself, and all spent some hours in piscatorial sport.

The spirits of all were now much on the rise.

It seemed certain that their famous trip across the continent of Africa was bound to be a success.

"In another day," declared Frank, "we shall reach the Niger."

"And then—"

"Beyond it is civilization. We will push on to the coast and meet Captain Weldon at Freetown."

"After that—"

"Home, sweet home."

Frank's prediction proved correct.

The next afternoon the machine crossed a broad savanna, and the waters of a great river burst upon the view of all.

It was the Niger.

At this point the great river ran due south and emptied into the Gulf of Guinea. A description of the Niger is not necessary as it is a well-known river.

To ford the river was now the exciting task of the travelers. It was no light one either.

But fortunately a camp of natives was found and these were glad to give assistance.

The huge vehicle glided down to the water's edge and then floated out into the current.

The natives with their canoes managed to tow the Omnibus across. When the opposite shore was reached the travelers drew up in line and cheered.

Once for America! Once for the Omnibus which had brought them so safely through, and three times three for Frank Reade, Jr.

The great journey from the Nile to the Niger had proved a most successful undertaking. All now looked forward to the homeward voyage.

—

We will not dwell upon the further incidents of the journey from the Niger to Freetown.

It was occupied with none but commonplace incidents and would furnish nothing of interest to the reader.

But the little seaport of Sierra Leone was safely reached, and there they found Captain Weldon and the Osman Pasha awaiting them.

The steamer's crew had been anxiously watching for their coming, and they were much delighted. It was a perfect ovation which the travelers received at Freetown.

But the machine was soon packed aboard the steamer, and the homeward start was made. The voyage home was propitious and uneventful.

Arrived in New York the Omnibus, packed in sections, was shipped to Readstown. Thither went Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp.

Edgar Foss and Walter Dane went at once to the Ramblers' Club to dilate upon their exciting experiences to an envious coterie of friends.

And this brings our story to its fitting close.

[THE END.]

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